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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1093
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 1143
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 5305
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY 2940
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE PRIORITY 4131
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO PRIORITY 0453
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY 2735
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB PRIORITY 2956
RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA PRIORITY 3439
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3281
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000684

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SUBJECT: GENERALS' RETIREMENT A POSITIVE STEP FOR ALBANIAN
ARMED FORCES

REF: TIRANA 98

Classified By: Ambassador Marcie B. Ries, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 19, the Ministry of Defense retired four top generals. The decision was taken despite considerable resistance in the beginning by the military's top brass and by President Moisiu. The retirement of these communist-era generals and their replacement by capable, progressive younger officers is a positive step for military reform and an indication of Albania's commitment to making the reforms necessary to join NATO. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The MOD held a retirement ceremony June 19 for MG Kostaq Karoli, Commander of Land Forces; MG Perlat Sula, Commander of Doctrine and Training; MG Ruzhdi Gjatoja, Military Advisor to the President; and BG Kudus Lama, Commander of Logistic Support. DefMin Fatmir Mediu thanked the generals for their contributions to the modernization of the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) and said the AAF was moving in the right direction. Mediu said the generals were retiring as part of the AAF's restructuring and reform.

¶3. (U) President Alfred Moisiu decorated Karoli with the Medal of the Order of Skenderbeg; Sula and Gjatoja with the Golden Medal of the Eagle; and Lama with the Medal for Military Services. In his remarks, Moisiu said that Albania had entered into a new phase of relations with the EU and NATO. With the reforms undertaken and deployments in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Iraq, he said, the AAF had proven itself ready for NATO. Moisiu noted that a recent USAID survey showed that the public trust for the military was among the highest enjoyed by any state institution. He also noted that this ceremony was the first of its kind since the end of Communism.

¶4. (C) Although Gjatoja is retiring from the military, he will continue to work as the President's Military Advisor. Karoli, Sula, and Lama will be replaced by BG Shpetim Spahiu, Col. Aleksander Lleshi, and Col. Elez Satki, respectively. Spahiu was Commander of the Rapid Reaction Brigade and is a leading candidate to become the next CHOD in the fall; Lleshi was Defense Attache in Germany. All the new commanders are regarded as capable and committed to reform.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The generals' retirement, which was urged upon them, reflects increased commitment by Albania to make the changes necessary to join NATO. Retirement of older personnel, some of whom have been resistant to reform, is a crucial component of the AAF's transformation from an obsolete, bloated Communist-era force to a smaller, leaner one capable of contributing to NATO. Mediu made the generals' retirement a key priority, but the effort met initial resistance from the AAF and Moisiu, himself a former military man and Deputy DefMin. We have made clear to the GoA on numerous occasions that taking this step was crucial to Albania's NATO aspirations. Much remains to be done for the AAF to have a modern, capable leadership that "thinks NATO," but this is an encouraging step and an indication of Mediu's strength as DefMin. END COMMENT.
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